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ABSTRACT

This study used the Good Teaching Survey to identify productive teaching techniques as determined by students, teachers, administrators, and parents that would be more likely to yield desired results in today's schools. Survey topics included: teaching on one's feet; making learning easier; inducing students to learn; accountability for learning; coercion in the classroom; school/classroom climate; and teaching for understanding. Each of the categories contained four statements to bring out respondents' attitudes toward teaching. A total of 8 school districts within a 50-mile radius of Little Rock, Arkansas, participated. From the school districts, 39 students, 7 parents, 20 elementary teachers, 42 secondary teachers, 2 elementary administrators, 9 secondary administrators, and 4 others completed surveys. Data analysis indicated that participants believed the following: effective teachers teach on their feet; teachers should arrange classroom time to spend at least a minute with each student at their desks; teachers should not have adversarial relationships with students; teachers should use coercion with students, but should also be very caring and hard working; students should not feel threatened in the classroom or school; student learning is best when bridges are developed to link the old with the new; and good teachers keep all students actively engaged in classroom topics being taught. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Teaching: A New Research Look at an Old Practice

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TEACHING: A NEW RESEARCH LOOK AT AN OLD PRACTICE

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Introduction

The job of the teacher has become an enormous challenge to be effective in many of today's classrooms. Teachers are expected to do an effective job of teaching students with many kinds of problems. Many of these students, who tend to make teaching a real challenge, have problems with misbehavior, attendance, study habits, motivation, parent support, and many more student learning ills.

Teaching to some individuals is a job, but teaching is a profession. Professionals take on difficult problems and bring a resolve to many of their schooling concerns. Teaching is also one of the many human processes that we do to advance our civilization. It is, therefore, important to note that our civilization will continue to advance if and only if public school classrooms are staffed with teachers with the professional skills to teach with an emphasis on student understanding.

An analysis of the Arkansas results on the Stanford Achievement Test for 312 school districts in Arkansas reveals that 58% of 5th graders, 54% of 7th graders, and 61% of 10th graders earned a composite score on tests covering reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies less than the 50th percentile (Arkansas Democrat Gazette, Nov. 20, 1997). The 50th percentile represents an average score. Students in some Arkansas schools scored below the 25th percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test. This review shows that the quality of the product (student) is weak in many of our schools. The conclusion is not indigenous to Arkansas schools. It is evident in many schools in the United States.

Quality students are produced by good teachers or quality teachers. It seems reasonable, therefore, if instructional behaviors known to be effective in the classroom are identified, teachers practicing these behaviors will help students to increase achievement scores in schools where they are low. So, any study with the potential to increase practitioners' knowledge of teaching will eventually improve student achievement scores in our elementary and secondary schools.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify productive teaching techniques as determined by students, teachers, administrators, and parents that are likely to yield desired results in today's schools. More specifically, the study will achieve objectives as follows:

- Identify productive teaching techniques that teachers believe are important.
- Identify productive teaching techniques that students believe are worthy.
- Identify productive teaching techniques that parents believe are valuable.
- Identify productive teaching techniques that school administrators believe are important..
- Compare and identify productive teaching techniques that teachers, students, parents, and school administrators have in common.

Program Description

As stated previously, the study is designed to collect opinion data from students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The study will identify productive teaching techniques as determined by each sample group and compare for commonalities present in all participating categories. A summary of the activities to complete the study is as follows:

1. The first activity was to develop a "Good Teaching Survey" to collect the opinions of students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. This activity of the study has been completed. The opinionary was designed to collect demographic data and to delineate teaching behaviors in seven major areas: teaching on , making learning easier, inducing students to learn, accountability for learning, coercion in the classroom, school classroom climate, and teaching for understanding.
2. Twelve school districts were selected to participate in the study. Of the twelve, eight school districts within a radius of 50 miles of Little Rock actually participated.
4. Pearson-moment correlation and percentages were used to analyze, evaluate, and report findings in the study.

Brief Review of Major Topics

To support this study, research will be reviewed on several topics. These topics are as follows: teaching for understanding, making learning easier, coercion in the classroom, inducing students to learn, accountability for learning, teaching on feet, and school classroom climate.

Teaching for Understanding

One would think that teachers have always taught for understanding. Nevertheless, according to Sergiovanni (1995, p. 190), in the new research, the emphasis is on teaching subject matter for understanding and on generative use of knowledge. Generative knowledge helps the student understand new situations. Thus, when students understand a lesson, the teacher is able to move the learner to the next higher learning concept and the student is more likely to record an acceptable achievement score.

Teaching for understanding is the knowledge retained from a lesson that is helpful for a present or future learning situations. It is also presenting bits of information on a concept to a student in a variety of ways. Learning through a variety of instances and examples aids understanding and transfer (Clark and Starr 1996, p. 31).

Student understanding requires the teacher to attend to many minute teaching details. It is not enough in the teacher's teaching to give a definition. The definition must be followed with an example followed with a demonstration or modeling when possible.

Making Learning Easier

Making learning easier should be the ultimate goal of any teacher. The teacher is the middle person between what is to be learned and the student. It is the teacher's task to take what is to be learned by the student, process it, break it down, and present to students at their level of understanding. When this task is achieved by the teacher the learning is made easier for the student because there is not a mismatch between student experiences and course content.

Some students misbehave because of a mismatch between course content and individual learning needs (Curwin and Mendler 1988, p. 168). They also reported that how the teacher presents material is more important than the content itself.

Coercion in the Classroom

Some teachers and administrators believe that students should be forced to act or think in a certain way by using pressure or threats. This tactic has been used by many teachers and administrators to manage students. Teachers and administrators, who believe in coercion, attempt to manage students by applying sanctions like detention, suspension, and corporal punishment. According to Glasser (1990, p. 28), this is not an effective strategy to work with resistant students, because as soon as a boss uses coercion, especially punishment, the boss and the worker become adversaries.

Inducing Students to Learn

Inducing students to learn is what the teacher does to cause students to learn. The teacher is the catalyst for the learning of each student in the classroom. This, of course, means the teacher, who induces students to learn, selects appropriate and important ideas, connects ideas to environment, shows value to learner, organizes convincingly, and presents in an entertainingly manner.

Effective teaching requires teachers to gain the students cooperation in the classroom. Walker (1990, p. 227) states that teaching is essentially inducing students to participate in educationally valuable activities. Thus, this study is also designed to identify those teaching strategies that will increase student participation in educationally valuable activities.

It is important to remember, many desirable things will not just happen. They happen because we plan it that way. So the teacher must develop and plan many worthy student actions. Thus, the student's actions determine what will be learned (Walker 1990, p. 366).

A teacher's ability to induce a student to learn is connected to one's understanding of motivation. Some students are not motivated because they fear failure and the competitive nature of the classroom, or it is due to a poor sense of self-worth (Lumsden 1995, p. 6). Thus, it is very important for teachers to help each student experience success with each lesson taught.

School Classroom Climate

School classroom climate is concerned with a teacher having a warm, supportive classroom for students. It also means the students feel sense of belonging and wanted in the classroom.

School climate refers to the overall character of the school (Rossow 1990, p. 42). It is how the teachers and students "feel" about the school. When the emphasis is placed on the learning environment,

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classroom climate may also be viewed as how the students feel about their ability to learn and their relationship with teacher.

In a room with a positive classroom climate, an atmosphere of courtesy vapors the air space. According to Glasser (1990, p. 123), courtesy means that you are kind; you listen to what the students have to say; you do not criticize, even when students do something you do not want them to do.

Teaching on Feet

Teachers who teach on their feet by walking around in the teaching setting, have a stronger command and a greater presence in the classroom. Teaching on feet is an excellent opportunity for the teacher to use proximity control to influence students. Proximity control is any movement toward or taking up a position in the vicinity of a disruptive student (Levin and Nolan 1996, p. 161). As verified by Levin and Nolan, often just walking toward the student while still conducting the lesson is enough to bring the student back on task. So, teaching on one's feet provides many opportunities for the teacher to increase and/or improve teaching effectiveness.

Accountability for Learning

Accountability for student learning in public schools came with the competency-based movement. The competency-based movement took Tyler's ideas to the implementation stage (Henson 1995, p. 187). As stated by Walker (1990, p. 79), the idea was to hold schools accountable for producing measurable results in the achievement of their graduates.

Analysis of Data and Results

As stated previously, this study was intended to identify teaching techniques viewed to important by students, parents, teachers and school administrators. A "Good Teaching Survey" was administered to 39 students, 7 parents, 20 elementary teachers, 42 secondary teachers, 2 elementary administrators, 9 secondary administrators, and 4 others. Correlation coefficient statistical techniques were used to analyze the relationship of the response of the variable groups.

The Pearson Product-moment method of correlation, which is probably the most widely used to determine relationships of variables, was used to analyze the data. This correlation technique shows how much relationship exists from a correlation coefficient of .00, which indicates no relationship, lies between the extreme of +1 and -1. This stud considered only values greater than .5 to be significant. Correlation, in fact, means relationship; it is a statistical term used to describe the relationship between two traits on characteristics that change or vary (Bertrand and Cebula 1980, p. 121). It is a number somewhere between +1 and -1 that tells us to what extent two things are related or tend to "go together" (Wise and Reitz 1967 p. 156). Correlation was used in this study as a tool to measure the relationship or strength of association between the variables (students, parents, teachers and administrators).

The Good Teaching Opinionary was designed to measure participants' attitudes in seven (7) categories. The seven categories were as follows: (1) teaching on feet; (2) making learning easier; (3) inducing students to learn; (4) accountability for learning; (5) coercion in the classroom; (6) school climate; and (7) teaching for understanding. Of the seven Good Teaching areas, the Pearson-product moment detected a positive correlation in areas a follows:

Table 1 shows the first significant relationship involving the statement "effective teachers teach on their feet." The statement "effective teachers teach on their feet" showed a Pearson correlation of .74341.

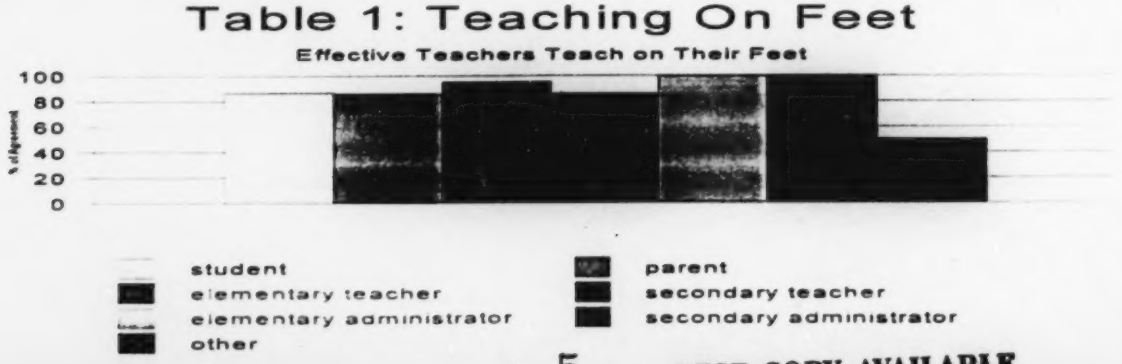

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Table 2 shows the second relationship in the area of teaching on feet. The statement "Teachers should arrange their classroom time to spend at least a minute or more with each student during class time helping the student at his / her desk" recorded a Pearson correlation of .97045.

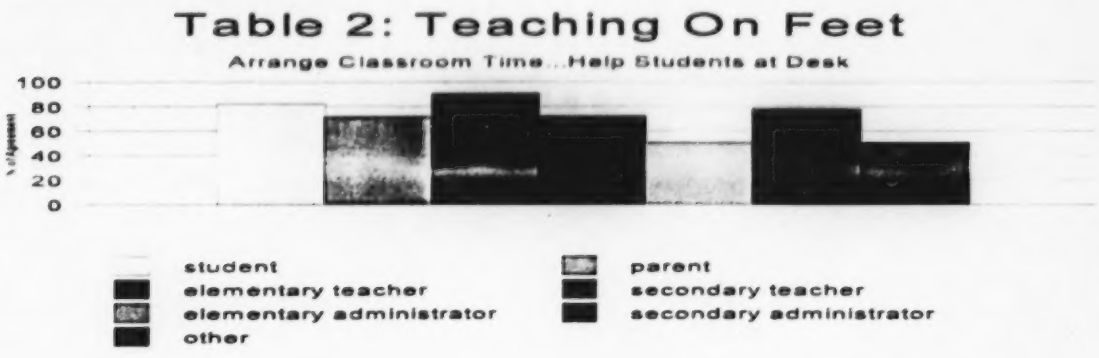

Table 3 shows the category of Coercion in the Classroom. The statement "Teachers should not have an adversarial relationship with students" show a Pearson correlation of .62355.

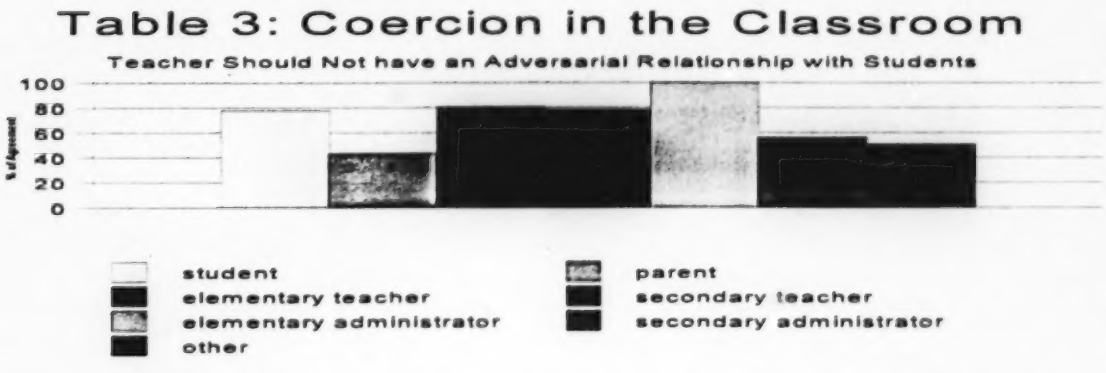

Table 4 is the second statement in the area of Coercion in the Classroom with a positive relationship. The statement "the teacher should use coercion with students, but s/he should be a very caring and hard-working person." The correlation is .54336.

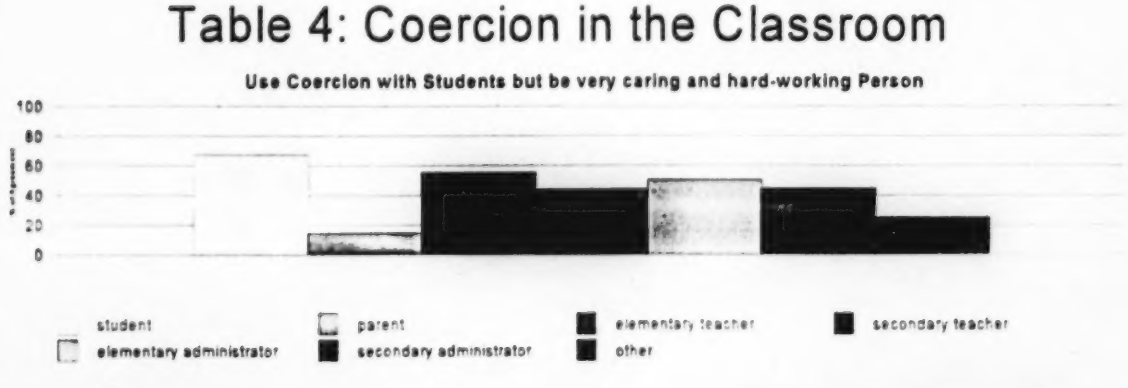

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Table 5 shows the relationship of the response of the participants to the classroom climate category. The statement "Students should not feel threatened in the classroom / school" shows a Pearson correlation of .77927.

Table 5: School / Classroom Climate

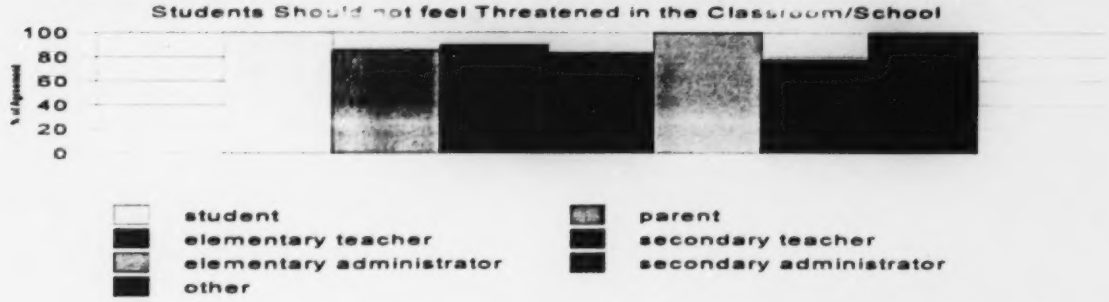


Table 6 shows the participants' attitudes toward the category teaching for understanding. To the statement, "Student learning takes place best when bridges are developed that link the new with the old," the Pearson correlation is .74787.

Table 6: Teaching for Understanding

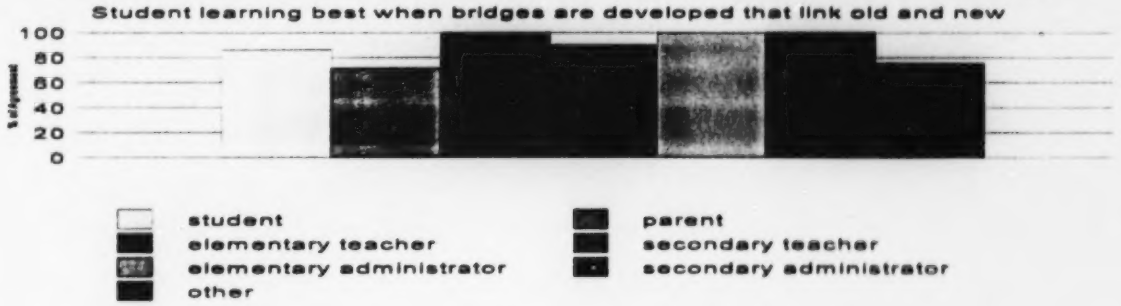
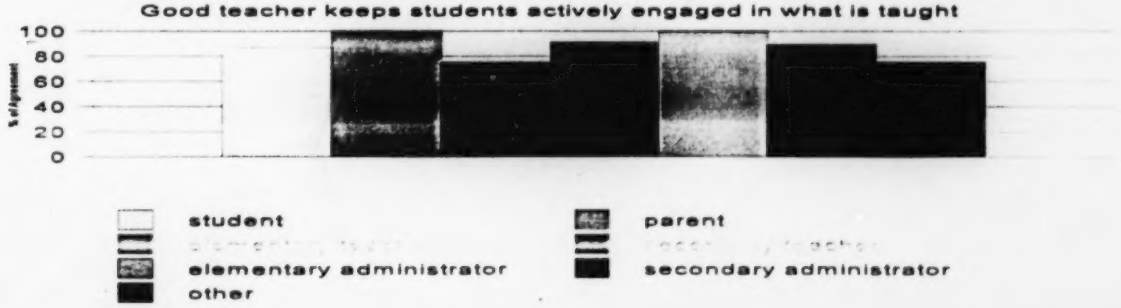


Table 7 shows the participants' response to the category of making the learning easier. To the statement "the good teacher should keep all students actively engaged in classroom topics taught." the Pearson correlation is .75030.

Table 7: Making Learning Easier



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Conclusion

The "Good Teaching" survey contained seven statement opinion categories: Teaching On Feet, Making Learning Easier, Inducing Students to Learn, Accountability to Learning, Coercion in the Classroom, School / Classroom Climate and Teaching for Understanding. Each of these categories contains four statements to bring out a participant's attitude towards teaching. Of the twenty-eight statements listed under seven categories, the Pearson product-moment correlation showed a positive correlation for only the following statements in regard to a relationship between students, parents, teachers and administrators:

1. Effective teachers teach on their feet.
2. Teachers should arrange their classroom time to spend at least a minute or more with each student during class time helping the student at his or her desk.
3. Teachers should not have an adversarial relationship with students.
4. The teacher should use coercion with students, but s/he should be a very caring and hard-working person.
5. Students should not feel threatened in the classroom or school.
6. Student learning takes place best when bridges are developed that link the new with old.
7. The good teacher should keep all students actively engaged in classroom topics taught.

End Note

This study identified good classroom teaching behaviors in the areas of teaching for understanding, making learning easier, teaching on feet, inducing students to learn, coercion in the classroom, school classroom climate, and accountability for learning which were common to all reference groups that have the potential to influence student learning. These areas are not finite or exhausted in regard to information to support each topic. Nevertheless, all teachers are expected to perform (teach) daily using the techniques of the seven areas mentioned above. Therefore, teaching strategies common to the belief of reference groups who influence the behavior of an individual, perhaps, will improve student achievement.

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